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ABSTRACT

School-based curriculum development--an intended goal in current educational reform in Taiwan--has brought many challenges to pedagogical practices at elementary and secondary schools. While facing the demands of enacting the newly reformed Curriculum Guidelines for Nine-Year Compulsory Education and implementing the idea of a school-based curriculum development, the organizing of a standing committee for curriculum development has become an urgent need for many schools. It is, therefore, important to examine related issues and policy options involved in school-based curriculum development and to find proper models and suggestions for elementary and secondary schools to organize curriculum development committees. These committees go on to develop the school-based curriculum. This study examines practitioners' views of and attitudes toward a school-based curriculum development at the beginning stages of a 2-year project. It also examines the education system's professional confidence and readiness in developing school curriculum autonomously. Based on the analysis of interview data collected from 12 schools in the Taipei area, this paper reports initial findings and the problems and promises embedded in the current school-based curriculum development movement in Taiwan. (DFR)

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School Improvement in Taiwan• Problems and Possibilities

The Implementation of School-Based Curriculum Development

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School-based curriculum development, as one of the intended goals in current educational reform in Taiwan, has brought a great deal of challenges to pedagogical practices at elementary and junior high schools. Facing the demands of enacting the newly reformed Curriculum Guidelines for Nine-year Compulsory Education and implementing the idea of school-based curriculum development, organizing a standing committee for curriculum development has become an urgent need for many schools. It is thus important to examine related issues and policy options involved in school-based curriculum development and to find proper models and suggestions for elementary and junior high schools to organize curriculum development committee and then to develop school-based curriculum. As at the beginning stage of a two-year project, this study examined practitioners' views of and attitudes toward school-based curriculum development, as well as their professional confidence and readiness in developing school curriculum autonomously. Based on the analysis of interview data collected from 12 schools in Taipei area, this paper reports the initial findings of the problems and promises embedded in the current school-based curriculum development movement in Taiwan.

Background and Purposes

Due to the economic development and political modernization, there have been numerous grass root movements going on in Taiwan for the past decade, advocating educational reforms and school innovation. One of the most challenging tasks has been the curriculum reform. In September of 1998, just five years after the "New Curriculum Standards" was promulgated, a newly reformed Curriculum Guidelines for Nine-year Compulsory Education was promulgated, and it was intended to be put into practice nation-wide in the school year of 2001. Though it has been under heating debates, the Curriculum Guidelines for Nine-year Compulsory Education was proposed by grass root educational reformers with the attempts to set students free from the teacher-centered, textbook-driven, and examination-oriented "encapsulation" of education (a term borrowed from Zais, 1986).

Derived ideas from "humanism," "the theory of multiple intelligences," "critical theory," and "constructivism," this newly promulgated "Curriculum Guidelines for Nine-year Compulsory Education" appears to be a "revolution" of curricular practice. It emphasizes curriculum integration and alternative evaluation, encourages team teaching and collaborative learning, and advocates the practice of school-based curriculum development. It provides rooms for autonomous curriculum governance at school level. Its aims are oriented toward more "personal relevance" and " social relevance" instead of pursuing "academic rationalism" (Chen, 1999). Such a curriculum reform plan, of course, challenges the traditional taken-for-granted pedagogical practice in many ways.

In order to prepare school administrators and teachers for the implementation of school-based curriculum development, this study is designed to examine related issues and policy options involved in school-based curriculum development, and to find proper operational models and suggestions for organizing and running curriculum development committee to develop school curriculum. The major purposes of this study include:

1. To learn from experiences of school-based curriculum development in different countries and to evaluate various models and operational systems.
2. To understand school administrators and teachers' perceptions of and attitudes

towards school-based curriculum development as well as their professional confidence and readiness in developing school curriculum.

3. To investigate the foundations and prerequisite conditions for local elementary and junior high schools to form curriculum committee and to carry out the idea of school-based curriculum development.
4. To develop contextually appropriate operational plans and models for elementary and junior high schools to organize and to run curriculum development committee.
5. To evaluate the effects and constraints of the implementation plans for school-based curriculum development.

The Meaning of Implementing School-based Curriculum Development

The nature and the definition of school-based curriculum development are actually open to variety of interpretation. Over the past twenty years or so, a number of educators have contributed to the literature on school-based curriculum development (e.g., Marsh, 1992; Marsh, Day, Hannay, & McCutcheon, 1990; Nias, Southworth & Campbell, 1992; Sabar, 1985; Skilbeck, 1988), providing conceptual frameworks for studying the decisions and actions involved in developing school curriculum. Based on lots of research findings, it shows that school-based curriculum development is not only an "action science" at practical level but also a sort of "philosophy of action" at perceptual level.

Basically, the idea of encouraging school-based curriculum development is that the best place for designing the curriculum is where the learner and the teacher interact—school. It also reflects calls for more active and direct school autonomy and participation in educational innovation (CERI, 1979). Realizing that the centrally planned curriculum development is abstract and do not consider the specific characteristics of different school affected, a policy of encouragement of school-based curriculum development in the current reform indeed is a big move for a top-down education system like Taiwan to shift to a bottom-up approach. Closely linked to the idea of encouraging school-based management, we cannot denial that the ideas behind encouraging and implementing the school-based curriculum development are also imported from the West, though the ways of running it might need to make some modification. With the hope to make every school a center for educational reform, every teacher a curriculum designer, and every classroom a laboratory of curriculum innovation, there are actually four major concepts/intentions behind the current reform for school-based curriculum development in Taiwan:

1. Renewing curriculum governance—to put into practice a decentralized management and shared governance.
2. Relocating power and redistributing resources—to increase the motivation on the part of school administrators and teachers to be called into action.
3. Adjusting curriculum decision-making process—to assure the shared responsibility and the ownership of curriculum decisions.
4. Enhancing professionalism—to empower and to enable teachers, and to encourage professional autonomy.

Research Methods and Procedures

In order to achieve the research goals, this study intended to conduct a two-year in-depth study (8/1/1999~7/31/2001) to examine related issues and administrative

options involved in school-based curriculum development. It is designed to proceed in two stages. The major tasks for the first stage (1st year) is to understand the problems and promises for implementing school-based curriculum development, to investigate the prerequisite conditions for school-based curriculum development, and to come up with some possible alternatives for operation. Then, the focus of the second stage (2nd year) is on the implementation and evaluation of school-based curriculum development plans through cooperative action research approach.

Instead of transplanting and introducing foreign models for local schools to follow, as the beginning part of this study, the researchers started with understanding of practitioners' perceptions of and attitudes toward school-based curriculum development through school visits and interviews with school administrators and teachers. Up to date, the researchers have visited 12 schools in Taipei area, including 6 elementary schools and 6 junior high schools. There were altogether 30 administrators and teachers interviewed. Based on the analysis of interview data, a questionnaire a designed to gain broader views on school-based curriculum development. It will be conducted in February among the participant experimental schools of Curriculum Guidelines for Year-year Compulsory Education (total of 200 schools). Meanwhile, the researchers will develop alternative operational models based on the understanding of the ecology and practical problems of the participant schools. For the second year, a cooperative action research will be conducted to have in-depth evaluative study with 2 to 4 schools to examine the school curriculum development process of school curriculum development committee. Thus, the followings are just initial findings of this study.

Preliminary Findings and Discussion

The results out of interview data collected during the school visits of 12 schools were very rich which though showed the problems and constraints of implementing school-based curriculum development there were also encouraging messages that may help the experimental implementation of school-based curriculum development. However, among the visited 12 schools, there was great diversity of views of and attitudes toward school-based curriculum development. Some of the variations are as follows:

		Elementary (n=6)	Junior High (n=6)
Levels of change	whole school	0	0
	subject area	2	1
	grade-level	1	0
	single teacher	1	1
	small groups of teachers	1	1
	just started to plan for change	1	1
	no change (wait and see)	0	2
Type of activity	Most are minor changes of existing content, only 1 junior high school and 1 elementary school have a complete review and renewal of the curriculum; and most schools are fuzzy about school-based curriculum development.		
CD Committee	5 schools do not have CD committee organized yet. The other 7 schools all involved principal, administrators, teachers and parents. Only 2 of them have strong advisory specialists.		

Leadership role	Most schools were initiated by the principal to enact the new curriculum policy. One school started before the curriculum guidelines. Most are administrator controlled. Only one school is teacher controlled.
Planning	Motives were mainly from the incentive of being funded for the experiment or to continue the previous multiple-intelligence project. Only one school was to overcome perceived deficiencies of provision and pupil needs. Direction of activities were planned mainly by administrators, some from teachers, only a little assistance from external specialist

During interviews with school administrators and teachers, a lot of implementation difficulties and constraints were discussed. There were shared concerns by both administrators and teachers, and there were particular concerns perceived by administrators but not teachers, and vice versa.

Shared Concerns

Lack of clear vision and whole picture of school-based curriculum development. Most administrators and teachers were frustrated about having no clear picture of the newly reformed curriculum guidelines, thus, they don't know how to set the goals and directions for school curriculum. They were not sure if they were heading toward the wrong direction. Therefore, they would prefer to have some advisory specialists or professors from universities to give them suggestions.

Lack of autonomous consciousness and professional confidence in developing school curriculum. Most administrators and teachers were not sure about to what degree and in what area they could make their own curriculum decisions. Even though they participated in curriculum decision-making, they were not certain about if they were making the right decisions.

Worry about the impact on students and the attitudes of parents. Most of them were afraid that the school-based curriculum would either lower students' competence level in senior high school entrance examinations or increase students' burden in study. Because most parents care about their children's grades very seriously, it would be difficult to explain to and to persuade parent to accept alternative curriculum design, teaching, and evaluation.

Problems and Constraints Perceived by School Administrators

Lack of willingness, ability, and skills to participate in curriculum development. Because most teachers did not have curriculum design courses in teacher colleges/normal universities, they had no experience in curriculum development and evaluation. Also, because there were no incentives provided for teachers participating in school curriculum development, it would be difficult to invite teachers to take extra time and spend more energy in developing curriculum.

Lack of trust and true empowerment. Most administrators felt that empowerment and ownership were still jargons. If some of the related policies (e.g., personnel and budget) were not changed or deregulated, it would be very difficulties to carry out those wonderful concepts in reality.

Lack of evaluative and feedback mechanism. As curriculum been developed, there were needs to evaluation it. But, what should be and how to set up the objective criteria for evaluating the curriculum? Who should do the evaluation? How to conduct the evaluation? Most administrators felt that there were needs not only to encourage internal and external evaluation of school curriculum but also to authorize the principal to conduct instructional supervision to ensure the enactment of school curriculum.

Problems and Constraints Perceived by Teachers

Lack of administrative support. Some teachers were very interested in and had tried some curriculum development at classroom level, but they felt sometime they did get enough administrative support in terms of providing necessary materials, time and space, as well as needed information and in-service training courses or workshops.

Lack of consensus and cooperative understanding in team teaching or group deliberation. Since most teachers were used to conduct classroom teaching by themselves. They were not used to work with other teachers as a team. Sometime they felt it was quite difficult to communicate with others and to reach consensus in group deliberation process. Sometime they would feel they would prefer to have an external advisory specialist to help with the final decisions. Also, a lot of times they felt it was quite difficult to share responsibilities in teaching and classroom management, and in evaluation.

Promises for Implementing School-based Curriculum Development

Demands of implementation from newly reformed policies. The newly reformed Curriculum Guidelines for Nine-year Compulsory Education was forcefully promulgated and required to be put into practice nation-wide in the school year of 2001. Though it caused a lot of doubts and debates about its time-line for implementation, it indeed provide a context and atmosphere to push forward the practitioners to take it more seriously about school innovation and curriculum reform.

Curricular consciousness awaken and awareness of pedagogical practice. Due to the series of the educational and curriculum reforms for the past ten years, teachers generally become more aware of their teaching and more critical about the textbook and materials they are using. All these have set steps for them to be prepared for school-based curriculum development.

Change of social value and political ecology. Due to the release of Martial Laws, the fast economic growth and the development of global politics, the urges of educational reforms promoted by grass root movement have made the publics be alert of the importance of curriculum change. More and more parents welcome new curricular and pedagogical practices. All these have also created an encouraging and supportive context for teachers to try out new ideas in the teaching.

(In)Conclusion

Since this is just a partial preliminary report of a two-year study, there is no way that a final conclusion can be drawn. However, we all need to try our best to make schools realistically and successfully play active roles in curriculum development. We also need to encourage practitioners to conduct a transformative leadership in curriculum decision-making. As the challenges become more sophisticated in educational praxis, we need to have more "curricular awareness" to understand how school-based curriculum development may carry out alternative curricular

assumptions and consequences. Confronting the development of new social, political order in a rapid changing society such as Taiwan, educational practitioners are faced immediately with a somewhat paradoxical state of affairs. It is important to realize that school curriculum has not one aim but many, and its development will continue passing through many contrasted stages. No matter what it turns out, we all need to make it possess a vision that focuses on opportunities for students to learn.

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